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A House with Many Mansions: The Anthropological Turn in Louvain Theology (1942 - 1962)

Abstract

This contribution engages in presenting the underdeveloped thematic cluster of twentieth-century theological research designated by the umbrella-term, ‘Christian anthropology’ and in particular, the contribution of the Louvain Faculty of Theology to that field. It proposes a new structure for this (international) field of Christian anthropology by focusing on theological reflection of the human being (Christian humanism), the temporal order as such (*Théologie des réalités terrestres*), the history in which humanity is placed (theology of history), the social context (theology of society), as well as the identity of the laity and their role within the Church and society (theology of the laity). In each section the active efforts of different members of the Belgian Faculty of Theology to make progress in these different areas shall be presented for the period 1942 - 1962.

Keywords

History of Church and Theology - Twentieth Century - Christian Anthropology
- Louvain Faculty of Theology - Theology and Culture - Christian Humanism –
Theology of History - Theology of the Laity

In 1946 the Louvain church historian Roger Aubert challenged his colleagues to engage in a renewal of theology: “ One must rethink the account of Christian anthropology in the light of Christ, for its reform will perhaps be the major work



of the mid-20th century.”¹ His observation must have been based on ongoing initiatives and research at the Belgian Faculty of Theology in Louvain. Moreover, his appeal was followed by an increase in theological reflection on human beings in their socio-historical context. As such, his words also proved to be prophetic for the development of a Louvain Christian anthropology and for the renewal of Christian anthropology in general. Indeed, different members of the Belgian Faculty of Theology engaged actively in international efforts and made progress in the different areas referred to by this one general term. Hence with regard to international reflection on Christian anthropology, the Louvain Faculty of Theology truly proved to be a ‘house with many mansions’.²

Theological reflection in Louvain did not develop in isolation. Throughout Europe a renewed interest in Christian anthropology can be discerned in the mid-twentieth century. Nonetheless, this theological renewal has remained largely unstudied in theological-historical research, thus presenting an exception to the thorough study of other movements of theological development,

¹ « Il faut repenser dans la lumière du Christ le traité de l’anthropologie chrétienne, dont la refonte sera peut-être l’œuvre majeure du milieu du XX^e siècle » (Roger Aubert, ‘Les grandes tendances théologiques entre les deux guerres,’ *Collectanea Mechliniensia* 16 (1946), 17-36, there 36).

² Reference is made to the commemoration stone in the *Collegium Veteranorum*-wing of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies (KU Leuven, Belgium) presenting the Bible verse: “In my Father’s house are many mansions (John 14, 2)”; signifying the dedication of this faculty as placed at the crossroads of university, Church community, and society. (cf. Lieven Boeve, ‘Woord vooraf’, in *Collegium Veteranorum: Aedes Sacrae Facultatis: Bij de inwijding van het Vereranencollege, Faculteit Godgeleerheid, K.U. Leuven, 1 juli 2009*, ed. Leo Kenis (Leuven, 2009), pp. 5-7.

such as *ressourcement*,³ Trinitarian renewal,⁴ *nouvelle théologie*,⁵ or the study of mid-twentieth century developments, such as the emergence of Left Catholicism.⁶ The most apparent reason for this scholarly inattention is the diversity by which this anthropological motif came to expression. Indeed, in many fields reform and progress can be discerned, yet they were often designated under different – though interrelated – terms. For example Evangelisa Vilanova referred in his *Historia de la Teología Cristiana* to parallel topics under the titles: ‘Teología de las realidades terrestres’, ‘Teología de la historia’ and ‘El giro antropológico de la teología’.⁷ Likewise, Louvain scholars also described the diffuse character of their contemporaneous theology. Gustave Thils referred to the theological rediscovery of the human person’s temporal situation, cultural actions, and cosmic dimensions. According to Thils, all of these aspects could, in last instance, be designated with the title ‘integral Christian anthropology.’ Other titles were also in use, such as ‘theology of history’, ‘theology of the cosmos’, ‘theology of social realities’, ‘theology and technique’, and ‘theology and culture’⁸. In addition, Aubert also referred to these ‘different’ theologies as a “theology of the body, of work, of progress, of social realities.”⁹ However, he also stressed their common foundation:

³ Cf. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford and New York, 2012).

⁴ Cf. Emmanuel Durand and Vincent Holzer, eds., *Les réalisations du renouveau trinitaire au XXe siècle* [Cogitatio Fidei 273] (Paris, 2010); Emmanuel Durand and Vincent Holzer, eds., *Les Sources du renouveau de la théologie trinitaire au XXe siècle* [Cogitatio Fidei 266] (Paris, 2008).

⁵ C.f. Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford and New York, 2009); Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London and New York, 2010).

⁶ Cf. Gerd-Rainer Horn and Emmanuel Gerard, eds., *Left Catholicism 1943-1955. Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation* [KADOC-Studies, 25] (Leuven, 2001); Jean-Louis Jadoulle, *Chrétiens modernes? Les engagements des intellectuels catholiques “progressistes” en Belgique francophone (1945-1958)*. « La Relève », « La Revue Nouvelle » et l’équipe belge de « Témoignage Chrétien » (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2003); Bart Latré, *Tussen strijd en inkeer. De kerk- en maatschappijkritische beweging in Vlaanderen 1958-1990* (Leuven, 2011); Denis Pelletier and Jean-Louis Schlegel, eds., *A la gauche du Christ. Les chrétiens de gauche en France de 1945 à nos jours* [Histoire] (Paris, 2012).

⁷ Cf. Evangelista Vilanova, *Historia de la teología Cristiana*, 3 vols. [Biblioteca Herder 182] (Barcelona, 1992), 3: 881-898.

⁸ Cf. Gustave Thils, *Orientations de la théologie* [Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 11] (Louvain, 1958), pp. 113-114 and 120-121.

⁹ Roger Aubert, ‘The Church of Rome’, in *Twentieth Century Christianity: A Survey of Modern Religious Trends by Leading Churchmen*, ed. Stephen Neil (London, 1962), 33-81, there 72.



In its confrontation with modern thought, theology was also led to discover new objects of study, aspects of reality that theologians in former times had not considered worthy of reflection, in particular the place of the laity in the Church, the sense of human history in the eyes of believers, and the Christian meaning of temporal values, scientific progress, secular action: theology of the laity, theology of history, theology of the temporal, to repeat the terms, which were unknown twenty years ago, which were gradually imposed.¹⁰

These diffuse currents, all flowing from the same interest - the theological significance of human beings in their socio-historical context - will be the starting point for this article. After proposing a structure for this (international) field of Christian anthropology, the contribution of Louvain scholars to that field shall be our point of focus: what were the main contributions of Louvain theologians in this area and how were their ideas received?

¹⁰ « Dans sa confrontation avec la pensée moderne, la théologie a été amenée également à découvrir de nouveaux *objets* d'étude, des aspects de la réalité auxquels les théologiens de jadis jugeaient inutile de s'arrêter, en particulier la place qui revient dans l'église aux laïcs, le sens de l'histoire humaine aux yeux du croyant, et la signification chrétienne des valeurs terrestres, du progrès scientifique, de l'action profane: théologie du laïc, théologie de l'histoire, théologie des réalités terrestres, pour reprendre les termes, inconnus il y a vingt ans, qui se sont peu à peu imposés. » (Roger Aubert, *La théologie catholique au milieu du XXe siècle* [Cahiers de l'actualité religieuse 3] (Tournai, 1954), p. 52).

Several parameters will facilitate this survey. First, in our dealing with Christian anthropology a new structure shall be adopted, namely, one that enables us to discuss the theological currents that contemplate the human being (Christian humanism), its worldly activities, (*Théologie des réalités terrestres*), the history in which the human person is placed (theology of history) and the society to which is contributed (theology of society), and finally the human person's position in the Church, thus making the connection with the world *ad extra* (theology of the laity).¹¹ Second, this contribution will give particular attention to scholars attached to the Louvain Faculty of Theology,¹² who taught either at this faculty itself, at its Higher Institute for Religious Sciences or at its Higher Institute of Philosophy.¹³ The article shall consider their work on the relation between Christianity and the world, thus completing thematically and chronologically some previous studies on the Louvain theologians.¹⁴ Third, with regard to the time period, the creation of the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences in 1942 is taken as point of departure, since the existence of this institute implied, according to Jean-Louis Jadoulle, precisely the faculty's engagement in the field of *théologie des réalités terrestres*, the theology of history, and theology of the laity.¹⁵ Indeed, this Institute was founded by the initiative of the exegete Lucien Cerfaux and the philosopher Albert Dondeyne to communicate the

¹¹ This structure parallels *Gaudium et spes*, the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution, which was the first conciliar document in the tradition of the Catholic Church to offer a developed Christian anthropology.

¹² For a general overview of the theological development of this faculty between 1900 and 1968, see Dirk Claes, *Theologie in tijden van verandering. De theologische faculteit te Leuven in de twintigste eeuw. 1900-1968* (Ph.D. diss., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2004); Frans Neirynck, 'Vijftig jaar Theologische Faculteit', in *De Theologische Faculteit. 1919-1969*, eds. Arthur Janssen, Gérard Philips and Joseph Coppens [Annua Nuntia] (Leuven, 1970), pp. 11-15.

¹³ Lieve Gevers, 'Vijftig jaar Hoger Instituut voor Godsdienstwetenschappen. 1942-1992', in *Hoger Instituut voor Godsdienstwetenschappen. Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid K.U. Leuven: 1942-1992: Rondom Catechese en Godsdienstonderricht*, eds. Mathijs Lamberigts, Lieve Gevers and Bart Pattyn (Leuven, 1992), pp. 3-58; Françoise Mirguet and Françoise Hiraux, *L'institut supérieur de philosophie de Louvain (1889-1968) : inventaire des archives, introduction historique* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2008).

¹⁴ Ward De Pril, 'Modernism and the Problematic Relation between History and Theology. The Search for a Compromise by Louvain Historians and Theologians (1870-1910)', *Church History and Religious Culture* 91 (2011), 59-78; Karim Schelkens, 'The Louvain Faculty of Theology: The Modern(ist) Heritage Reconciling History and Theology', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 104 (2008), 856-891.

¹⁵ Jean-Louis Jadoulle, *Les visages de l'église de Belgique à la veille du concile Vatican II*, in *Vatican II et la Belgique*, ed. Claude Soetens [Sillages, 2] (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1996), 11-70, there 57.

principles of Catholicism to an academic audience outside the classical borders of the theological faculty.¹⁶ At the other end of the spectrum is 1962, the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, during which time the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* was discussed and promulgated marking reception of Christian anthropology into official Church teaching for the first time.¹⁷

1. Christian Humanism

Christian humanism in this context refers to a current of thought which emerged in the 1930s and centered on the idea that perfecting one's personality was not exclusive with the principles of Christian revelation. On the contrary, Christianity could stimulate the development of the human being, and even offer human beings their full completion. Based on a long tradition of searching for a

¹⁶ After its foundation this autonomous institute offered a complementary theological formation for students of other academic studies. On its further development see : Lieve Gevers, 'Theologische vorming van religieuzen en leken,' in Lieve Gevers, *Kerk in de kering. De katholieke gemeenschap in Vlaanderen. 1940-1980* (Kalmthout, 2014), pp. 125-176.

¹⁷ Philippe Bordeyne, *L'homme et son angoisse: la théologie morale de « Gaudium et spes »* [Cogitatio Fidei] (Paris, 2004) ; Philippe Bordeyne, 'Signs of the Times and Moral Anthropology in Gaudium et spes,' in *Revisiting Vatican II : 50 Years of Renewal*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara, 2 vols. (Bangalore, 2014), 1 : 266-280 ; Luis Ladaria, 'L'homme à la lumière du Christ dans Vatican II,' in *Vatican II. Bilan et perspectives*, ed. René Latourelle [Recherches Cerf - Bellarmin] (Montréal – Paris, 1988), 409-422 ; Francesco Scanziani, 'La Chiesa nel mondo. Aspetti teologici e antropologici in Gaudium et spes,' in *40 anni dalla "Gaudium et spes". Una eredità da onorare*, eds. Giovanni Turbanti, Francesco Scanziani, Dionigi Tettamanzi (Milano, 2005), 57-94.

humanist revalorization,¹⁸ particularly in francophone theology¹⁹, this movement became popular as a Christian answer to atheistic humanism. In its first period, founding works were written by François Charmot and Eugène Masure, but the most important contribution was the book *L'humanisme intégral* of the French philosopher and neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain.²⁰ The proposed project to create a 'better man' also served a larger one, namely, the construction of an integral Christian society. This society would, in turn, be the best environment to guarantee the possibility of developing and perfecting one's personal life. Thus, the humanism developed in this first period could be depicted as a counter-cultural self-centred movement that aimed at converting others. After the Second World War, the theme would refocus more on the Christian understanding of the human person, their nature and bodies, and their relation with the broader culture. The Christian humanist would be a witness in society and at its service. Thus, during this period, the dialogical relation with the world and others increased in importance. Exemplary for this time period is the work of the French theologian Jean Mouroux.²¹ This theme also received impetus from other currents of thought. For example, the theme was marked by input and inspiration from the current of 'personalism' with its focus on the centrality of the human person in philosophy and theology. Of great value for this tradition was the French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, who, inspired by the thought of Maritain and Henri Bergson, founded the journal *Esprit* in 1932 and thereby inaugurated a

¹⁸ Cf. Florian Baab, *Was ist Humanismus? Geschichte des Begriffes, Gegenkonzepte, säkulare Humanismen heute* [Ratio Fidei] (Regensburg, 2013).

¹⁹ Nonetheless, we may not forget that also German theologians, and in particular Karl Rahner, contributed to this anthropological turn. Cf. Anton Losinger, *The Anthropological Turn. The Human Orientation of the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Fordham, 2000)

²⁰ François Charmot, *L'humanisme et l'humain : psychologie individuelle et sociale* (Paris, 1934) ; Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégral. Problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté* (Paris, 1936) ; Eugène Masure, *L'humanisme chrétien* (Paris, 1937)

²¹ Jean Mouroux, *sens chrétien de l'homme* [Théologie] (Paris, 1945) ; Jean Mouroux, *L'Expérience chrétienne. Introduction à une théologie* [Théologie Aubier 26] (Paris, 1952).



tradition of engaged personalist thought that was also well received in Belgium.²² The philosophical current of existentialism with its interest in the existence of the human subject and its freedom also proved to be of influence for the development of Christian humanism. Atheist humanism, for which the book *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*²³ of Jean-Paul Sartre serves as an outstanding example, both presented a reaction to Christian humanism and constituted a new impulse for its further development.²⁴ Moreover, existentialists such as Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers, in their openness towards transcendence, prepared a path to incorporate this philosophical current and make it fruitful within theology.

At the Faculty of Louvain this thought found its way into the work of two authors in particular. First and foremost the work of Charles Moeller must be mentioned here.²⁵ After the foundation of the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences, Moeller was invited to Louvain to give evening lectures on Christian themes in literature. These lectures, in which he developed his own perspective on Christian humanism based upon an outstanding literary knowledge, soon became an enormous success, drawing large crowds and influencing a whole

²² Cf. Jean-Louis Jadoulle, 'Les groupes Esprit de Belgique durant l'entre-deux-guerres,' in *Emmanuel Mounier en Belgique. 70 ans d'Esprit* (Bruxelles, 2002), pp. 49-63.

²³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris, 1946).

²⁴ E.g. Henri de Lubac, *Le drame de l'humanisme athée* (Paris, 1944)

²⁵ Fernand Colleye, *Charles Moeller et l'arbre de la croix. Crise de l'église et désarrois du monde. La vie d'un théologien du XXème siècle* (Paris, 2007); Jean-Marie van Cangh, ed., *In memoriam Mgr. Charles Moeller* (Louvain-la-Neuve, s.d.); Jean Tordeur and Fernand Colleye, 'Moeller, Charles,' in *Nouvelle Biographie Nationale* (2003), 260-263.

generation of students.²⁶ In his books *Humanisme et sainteté* and *Sagesse grecque et paradoxe chrétien*, he presented Christian humanism as the completion and full synthesis of the historical and literary understanding of the human person in the works of pre-Christian classics (e.g. Homer and Vergil), European literary classics (e.g. Montaigne, Cervantes, Shakespeare,...), and contemporary literature (e.g. Graham Greene, Albert Camus,...).²⁷ The ‘Humanism of the Beatitudes’²⁸ which he developed, aimed to deal with the confrontation between an autonomous human culture and a Christian tradition based on the Bible as well as an authentic faith encounter with a personal God. His use of literature and adherents of existentialism in the service of rediscovering the Christian tradition would also come to the fore in his popular volumes *Littérature du XXe siècle et le christianisme*.²⁹ At first sight, Moeller seems to act in these works as a mere literary critic. Nonetheless, his reviews of modern literature were always completed with their relation to Christian themes and their significance for the human person.

Albert Dondeyne, a professor at the Higher Institute of Philosophy, is also known as the mentor of the *Universitas-mouvement*.³⁰ This student movement at the Catholic University of Louvain, in line with the intentions of its mentor, sought to bring about the full (Christian) humanist formation of its students.

²⁶ “Les lundis de l’abbé Moeller, c’était pour notre génération, et cela durera plus de vingt ans, l’événement de l’année louvaniste” (André Houssiau, ‘In memoriam Mgr Charles Moeller,’ in *In memoriam Charles Moeller*, ed. Jean-Marie van Canghai (Louvain-la-Neuve, s.d.), 31-36, there 32).

²⁷ Charles Moeller, *Humanisme et sainteté. Témoignages de la littérature occidentale* [Bibliothèque de l’Institut Supérieur des Sciences Religieuses 1] (Tournai, 1946) ; Charles Moeller, *Sagesse grecque et paradoxe chrétien. Témoignages littéraires* [Bibliothèque de l’Institut Supérieur des Sciences Religieuses 4] (Tournai, 1948).

²⁸ We have chosen this term to designate Moeller’s thought in general because of his insistence that the final completion of human life can be understood as an encounter with the Christ of the Beatitudes: See for example the title of an announced book on *Humanisme des Béatitudes*, which never appeared, or the concluding words of Moeller, *Sagesse grecque et paradoxe chrétien* (see above, n. 32), p. 367: “«Jette ce livre, Nathanaël». Ouvre l’évangile et lis. Entends la «bonne nouvelle» et vois dans tous les hommes, malheureux, souffrants, malgré leurs péchés, - «car la miséricorde de Dieu est infinie», et «Ses voies ne sont pas nos voies», - vois en tous les hommes se profiler l’icône du Christ des Béatitudes”.

²⁹ Of the first volume 43,000 copies were sold (cf. Tordeur and Colleye, *Moeller* (see above, n. 28), 261).

³⁰ Albert Dondeyne, *Gelovend in de wereld* [Patmos-reeks : de christen in de tijd], Festschrift Albert Dondeyne (Antwerpen, 1972); Jean Ladrière, ‘In memoriam Albert Dondeyne,’ *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 83 (1985), 462-484 ; Gabriël Buyse, et al., *In dienst van geloof en wereld : A. Dondeyne 1901-1985* (Leuven, 1985).



Whereas Dondeyne's focus during the interbellum still bore witness to the ideal of reconquering society through Catholic Action, in line with the 'Revolution von Rechts' idea popular among the students,³¹ his position would develop after the Second World War towards a new humanist tradition that would take seriously the challenges of contemporary culture (esp. the social question).³² As with Moeller, he endeavoured to renew the theological understanding of the human being from the categories of existentialism, giving attention to the human subject in its context, its freedom to act and with regard to the principle of tolerance.³³ This made him not only an enthusiastic participant in the development of the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences, but it also brought him into contact with intellectuals engaged in similar projects. He participated, for example, in the Study Weeks of the French *Centre Catholique des Intellectuels Français*, which aimed from 1941 onwards, to bring likeminded Catholic intellectuals together to consider the exigencies of the time and reflect on contemporary movements from a Christian perspective.³⁴ Moreover, after the apparent condemnation of existentialism in the encyclical *Humani generis* in 1950, Dondeyne successfully

³¹ Cf. Louis Vos, *Idealisme en engagement. De roeping van de katholieke studerende jeugd in Vlaanderen (1920-1990)* (Leuven/Den Haag, 2011), pp. 63-72.

³² Exemplary for this position were Dondeyne's articles: Albert Dondeyne, 'L'humanisme de demain,' *Synthèses* 1 (1946), 30-44; Albert Dondeyne, 'Het humanisme van morgen,' *Dietsche Warande en Belfort* 94 (1949), 323-332; Albert Dondeyne, 'Christelijk humanisme,' in *Centurio* 2 (1950), 225-229.

³³ It should however be noted that Moeller focused mostly on the literary works of the existentialist authors. He would also use this argument as an excuse to avoid possible suspicions concerning or condemnations of his works.

³⁴ Claire Toupin-Guyot, *Les intellectuels catholiques dans la société française: le Centre catholique des intellectuels français (1941-1976)*. Rennes, 2002.

advocated for the legitimate incorporation of some forms of existentialism within Catholic theology and philosophy in his articles 'Les problèmes philosophiques soulevés dans l'Encyclique Humani generis'.³⁵

The promotion of Christian humanism could also be found outside the walls of the Faculty of Theology. In particular, the theme of Christian humanism was present in the work of the Dominican father Jan-Hendrik Walgrave teaching at the *studium* of the Dominicans in Louvain from 1943 onwards.³⁶ His book *Op menselijke grondslag: grondpijlers voor een christelijk humanisme*³⁷ testified to a broad humanist formation and the will to establish an ideal view of the human being, and its relation with culture from a Christian perspective. Moreover, under the pseudonym *Humanus* he advocated in the journal *Kultuurleven* for a renewal of culture based upon an increased humanist consciousness.³⁸ Eventually in 1957, Walgrave would also enrich the teaching staff of the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences.

2. *Théologie des réalités terrestres*

As a result of this theological interest in the human being, there emerged an increased attention to human activities in the world and to the theological significance of the context of those activities. This increased attention became

³⁵ Albert Dondeyne, 'Les problèmes philosophiques soulevés dans l'Encyclique Humani generis,' *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 49 (1951), 5-56 and 141-188 and 293-356. These articles were later published in the form of a book : Albert Dondeyne, *Foi chrétienne et pensée contemporaine* [Bibliothèque philosophique de Louvain] (Louvain, 1951).

³⁶ On Walgrave's humanism, see: Bernard J. De Clercq, 'De vlag van het christelijk humanisme (1945-1964),' *Kultuurleven* 67 (2000), 16-27.

³⁷ Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Op menselijke grondslag: grondpijlers voor een christelijk humanisme* (Antwerpen, 1955). See also, Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Op de grondslag van het woord: openbaring en gelovig bestaan* (Tielt, 1965). These books formed a diptych elaborating theological anthropology and theology of revelation.

³⁸ Jan Hendrik Walgrave, 'Humanisme en christelijk humanisme, de groei van de idee,' *Kultuurleven* 15 (1948), 293-300.



known under various titles, but probably the most common were *Théologie des réalités terrestres* and incarnational theology.³⁹

It was again in the French-speaking areas that overtures were made. First, in the wake of Neo-Thomism,⁴⁰ an ‘open Thomism’ sought to incorporate insights from the disciplines and methods of the humanities into its approach. This was initially promoted both at the Institut Catholique de Paris by Mgr. D’Hulst, and at the Catholic University of Louvain by the Louvain philosopher – and later archbishop – Désiré Mercier, who founded the Higher Institute for Thomistic Philosophy.⁴¹ With regard to the temporal order it must be noted that art in particular, in close liaison with the concept of beauty, received special neo-scholastic interest. This was exemplified in the person of Maritain. His view on the Christian value of art would exert a great influence on numerous artists, either through direct initiatives as the organization of the Thomist Study Circles at Meudon or indirectly through his works, such as his book *Art et scolastique*.⁴² In

³⁹ We prefer to use the term ‘*Théologie des réalités terrestres*’ over ‘incarnational theology’ (cf. Michael Quisinsky, ‘The “Interference” between Nouvelle Théologie and Catholic Practice in Church and Society,’ *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 90 (2014), 71-98) or ‘sacramental ontology’ (cf. Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology* (see above, n. 5) to avoid the tendency to lump together all these aspects under the denominator of ‘*nouvelle théologie*’. Preserving such distinctions is useful when identifying a phase in which the ‘*nouvelle théologie*’ internationalized (e.g. Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology* (see above, n. 5)).

⁴⁰ A good introduction to the success and spread of this theological current can be found in Roger Aubert, *Aspects divers du néo-thomisme sous le pontificat de Léon XIII* [Aspetti della cultura cattolica nell’Età di Leone XIII: atti del convegno tenuto a Bologna il 27-28-29 dicembre 1960] (Rome, 1961).

⁴¹ cf. Louis Raeymaeker, ‘Les origines de l’Institut supérieur de Philosophie de Louvain,’ *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 49 (1951), 505-633; Roger Aubert, ‘Désiré Mercier et les débuts de l’Institut de Philosophie,’ *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 88 (1990), 147-167.

⁴² Jacques Maritain, *Art et scolastique* (Paris, 1920). See for Maritain’s relation with aesthetics and art : Rajesh Heynickx and Jan De Maeyer, eds., *The Maritain Factor. Taking religion into interwar Modernism* (Leuven, 2010); John G. Trapani, *Poetry, Beauty, and Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain* (Washington, 2011). Another influential French author interested in the relation between

the French current of *nouvelle théologie* which reacted against the later rigidity and the manual tradition of neo-scholasticism, another type of theological interest in the temporal order arose, one based upon a strong historical consciousness. In particular, the French Dominicans Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar of the *studium* Le Saulchoir accepted an incarnational theology,⁴³ that, in Chenu's terms, considered contemporary events as 'lieux théologiques *en acte*.'⁴⁴ By emphasizing the incarnational aspect of the Catholic faith, they wanted to touch on the daily lives of the faithful who often felt estranged from Church and theology; a vision that was shared by the Jesuits of La Fourvière, and Jean Daniélou in particular.⁴⁵ The efforts of renewal by these theologians would however be put on hold by the publication of *Humani generis* in 1950.⁴⁶ Third, challenged by the ideas promoted by Marxism and the secularization of the working class, the (Christian) value of human labour would become one of the fundamental themes of this theology, as evidenced by Chenu's *Pour une théologie du travail*⁴⁷. This emphasis often went hand in hand with support of more practical initiatives, such as the worker-priest movement.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, it would be the Louvain professor of Fundamental Theology, Gustave Thils,⁴⁹ who, according to Roger Aubert, contributed to the

Christianity and art was the historian Henri-Irenée Marrou: Henri Davenson, *Traité de la musique selon l'esprit de saint Augustin* [Les cahiers du Rhône. Série blanche, 2] (Neuchâtel, 1942).

⁴³ Often the Belgian-born Dominican Edward Schillebeeckx is also presented as elaborating an incarnational theology, or a theology of culture. E.g. Erik Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in His History: I.: A Catholic Theology of Culture 1914-1965*, translated by J. Bowden (Dulles, 2002); Stephan Van Erp, 'Incarnatorische theologie,' *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 50 (2010), 34-46.

⁴⁴ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie : Le Saulchoir*, Kain : *pro manuscripto*, 1937 ; re-issued by Giuseppe Alberigo, et al., eds., *Une école de théologie : Le Saulchoir* [Théologies] (Paris, 1985), there p. 142.

⁴⁵ See in particular the programmatic text : Jean Daniélou, 'Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,' *Études* 79 (1946), 5-21.

⁴⁶ See in particular Étienne Fouilloux, *Un Église en quête de liberté : La pensée catholique Française entre modernisme et Vatican II (1914-1962)* (Paris, 1998).

⁴⁷ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Pour une théologie du travail* (Paris, 1955).

⁴⁸ Cf. Emile Poulat, *Les Prêtres ouvriers. Naissance et fin* (Paris, 1999).

⁴⁹ Concerning his life, see: Emilio Brito, 'Le professeur émérite Gustave Thils,' in *Index Generalis 1982-1997*, ed. Gilbert Van Belle, [Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 134] (Leuven, 1999), 35-41; Joseph Famerée, 'L'œuvre théologique de Mgr G. Thils (1909-2000),' *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 31 (2000), 474-491; Camille Focant, 'Hommage à Mgr Thils,' in *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 31 (2000), 467-473; Roger Aubert, 'La carrière théologique de Mgr Thils,' in *Voies vers l'unité*, FS Gustave Thils (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981), 7-27; Guy Harpigny, 'Interview de Monseigneur Gustave Thils,' *La Foi et le Temps* 18 (1988), 231-258.



success of the term of *Théologie des réalités terrestres*.⁵⁰ More recently, in his historical overview of twentieth-century theology Rosino Gibellini described Thils as one of the first to systemize theological reflection on the temporal order.⁵¹ His book *Théologie des réalités terrestres I. Préludes*, published in 1947,⁵² was the first of its kind to offer this theological approach a method rooted in the Church's tradition that could be applied to any conceivable reality. Thils himself would present in his book a first application of that method to culture, technique, art, work, and social realities. He, along with many other professors at the Faculty of Theology, was acquainted with those realities through his lectures and spiritual guidance for movements of Catholic Action. Thus his theology also aimed to transform the temporal order according to the lines of revelation: "Only a theology of temporal values shall be able to indicate in full how things have to be transformed to obtain an unalterable beauty and as such, to please God."⁵³

⁵⁰ Aubert, *La théologie catholique au milieu du XXe siècle* (see above, n. 11) p. 63. Moreover, Aubert pointed out that it was in particular Thils' expertise in this domain that would earn him his appointment at the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences: "La théologie des réalités terrestres était un thème d'actualité, bien adapté aux préoccupations des jeunes chrétiens du temps sur le point de s'engager à l'un ou l'autre titre dans une activité dite profane, et on songea tout naturellement à inviter M. Thils à venir développer ses idées à l'Institut" (Aubert, 'La carrière théologique de Mgr Thils,' (see above, n. 56), p. 18).

⁵¹ "Con il fiuto che sa cogliere i temi che sono nell'aria e con la prontezza a proporre una prima sistemazione per dare un orientamento all'azione, il teologo belga affrontava il tema del rapporto tra vangelo e mondo, che riteneva ormai matura sia sotto il profilo culturale, che sotto il profilo teologico" (Rosino Gibellini, *La teologia del XX secolo* [Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea 69] (Brescia, 1992) p. 282).

⁵² Gustave Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres. I. Préludes* (Bruges and Paris, 1947).

⁵³ « Seule une théologie des valeurs temporelles pourra indiquer de manière complète comment les choses doivent être transformées pour acquérir une inaltérable beauté et ainsi, plaire à Dieu » (Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres. I.* (see above, n. 59), p. 38).

3. Theology of History

The study of the nature of the human person and human activities brought to the fore questions regarding the course of the history of which that person was a part and to which that person contributed, resulting in the development of a theology of history.⁵⁴ From a societal perspective this quest originated negatively out of the experience of the world as a material and spiritual chaos and positively from a hope based on cultural optimism rooted in scientific progress. Three different perspectives on historical development emerged: communist, protestant and catholic. The conceptual elaboration of a theology of history can be considered as a gradual development in reaction to Marxist and historical materialism which drew attention to the value of history both in philosophy and in theology. Especially within theology, the answers to the meaning and value of history differed greatly, depending on whether the reflection concerned the past, present or future. In research, two approaches were used for categorizing this theological current. The first approach imposed a strong division between two groups⁵⁵: on the one hand, a group favouring the element of incarnation within Catholicism and considering incarnation to be its founding principle, thereby attaching a positive value to the present-day and fostering an optimistic hope for increasing progress in the future. On the other hand, a second group was indicated, which preferred the eschaton over the incarnation, thus emphasizing the contingent

⁵⁴ For more information on this topic see: Roger Aubert, 'Discussions récentes autour de la théologie de l'histoire,' *Collectanea Mechliniensa* 33 (1948), 129-149; Jean Connolly, *The Voices of France. A Survey of Contemporary Theology in France* (New York, 1961); Jean Connolly, *Human History and the World of God: The Christian Meaning of History in Contemporary Thought* (New York and London, 1965); Paul Henry, 'The Christian Philosophy of History,' *Theological Studies* 13 (1952), 419-432; Léopold Malevez, 'Deux théologies catholiques de l'histoire,' *Bijdragen. Tijdschrift voor Philosophie en Theologie* 10 (1949), 225-240; P.D. Optatus, 'Theologie der geschiedenis in het verleden en het heden,' *Katholiek archief* 8 (1953), 265-312.

⁵⁵ Among others Villanova (*Historia de la teología Cristiana* (see above, n. 8), pp. 881-898) brings forward a perspective on this strong dichotomy between 'incarnationalists' and 'eschatologists'. Besides, Rosino Gibellini also refers to these two opposing positions and connects them with two journals: the (eschatological) *Dieu vivant*, and the (incarnational) *Esprit* (cf. Gibellini, *La teologia del XX secolo*, (see above, n. 58), p. 286.)



situation of the present-day and its discontinuity vis-à-vis the eschatological state. The second way to approach these differing appreciations of history in theology is by recognizing the antithesis between the incarnational and the eschatological, but considering them as two conceptual extremes, although both Catholic,⁵⁶ between which different positions are possible. Tending towards the incarnational side are theologians such as Gustave Thils, Maurice Montuclard, Dominique Dubarle, Bruno de Solages, and Léopold Malevez,⁵⁷ all described in one way or another as inspired by the works of Teilhard de Chardin. By contrast, Louis Bouyer is often identified as a theologian tending towards the eschatological side.⁵⁸ In between these ends of the spectrum, gradations are possible, such as those focussing on the cross or a sacramental understanding of history, represented by the work of Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou, Hans Urs von Balthasar, or Gaston Fessard.⁵⁹

In Louvain, the emergence of a theology of history was first noted by Roger Aubert who described its development and characteristics in his 1948

⁵⁶ This is an emphasis given in Thils, *Orientations de la théologie* (see above, n. 9), p. 157.

⁵⁷ Their representative contributions are among others: Maurice Montuclard, 'L'église et les valeurs modernes,' *Jeunesse de l'église* 5 (1945), 9-75 ; Maurice Montuclard, 'La médiation de l'église et la médiation de l'Histoire,' *Jeunesse de l'église* 7 (1947), 9-33 ; Dominique Dubarle, 'L'église et le monde : harmonie ou divorce,' *La Vie spirituelle* 77 (1947), 547-571 and 78 (1948) 311-335 ; Bruno de Solages, 'La pensée chrétienne face à l'évolution,' *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique de l'Institut Catholique de Toulouse* 48 (1947), 103-116.

⁵⁸ Esp. the work Louis Bouyer, 'Christianisme et eschatologie,' *La vie intellectuelle* 16 (1948), 6-38.

⁵⁹ E.g. the works Gaston Fessard, 'Théologie et histoire,' *Dieu vivant* 8 (1947), 37-65 ; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologie der Geschichte : ein Grundriss* (Einsiedeln, 1950); Yves Congar, 'Une conclusion théologique à l'enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance,' *La Vie Intellectuelle* 37 (1935), 214-249 ; Jean Daniélou, 'Christianisme et histoire,' *Études* 254 (1947), 166-184.

study: ‘Discussions récentes autour de la théologie de l’histoire.’⁶⁰ Theological reflections on this theme were already underway at the faculty, as is demonstrated for example, by the visit of Yves Congar to Louvain in January of the same year to participate in the Theological Circle of Louvain, a non-institutional discussion group of theologians whose theme that year was the theology of history.⁶¹ It was Gustave Thils who would become known as one of the main proponents of this theology of history. In 1949, he published his book *Théologie des réalités terrestres. II. Théologie de l’histoire*⁶² in which he mapped out the different initiatives contributing to the theology of history movement, especially in the francophone world,⁶³ and then went on to present some further impulses and his own position in the field. The value of Thils’s theology of history lies in its ability to describe the underlying metaphysical principles at work in the temporal progress of history. According to Thils, the principles could enable humanity to understand the temporal order and the path it could take in history, understood here as salvation history. Active participation in this progress was possible and considered to be a contribution to the ‘spiritual’ aspect, or development, of history, as opposed to what was considered to be of the ‘flesh’.⁶⁴ The increasing presence of these ‘spiritual’ aspects resulted, according to Thils, in an ‘inchoate’ presence of the eschaton in the temporal order. This position was clearly more nuanced than the position previously taken in his first volume, the *Préludes*, since it tried to do justice to the aspect of incarnation as well as the eschaton; all while not giving in to pessimism. Critical reviews of his first volume, identifying it as

⁶⁰ Aubert, ‘Discussions récentes’ (see above, n. 61).

⁶¹ Letter of Abbé Asveld to Yves Congar, 12 January 1948, in *Fonds Yves Congar 1000 (Archives de la Province Dominicaine de France, Paris)*.

⁶² Gustave Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres. II. Théologie de l’histoire* (Bruges and Paris, 1949).

⁶³ He critiqued for example strongly the eschatological position of Daniélou (e.g. Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres. II.* (see above, n. 69), p. 45)

⁶⁴ This distinction should not be considered as the opposition between ‘Spirit’ and ‘Matter’ : “Le binôme Pneuma-Sarx ne doit pas être confondu avec un autre que l’on pourrait exprimer par les mots esprit-matière” (Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres. II* (see above, n. 69), p. 60).

“a somewhat excessive optimism”⁶⁵ (Jean Daniélou) or “not sufficiently eschatological”⁶⁶ (Henri-Irénée Marrou), would, however, result in Thils becoming known as one of the clearest representatives of the incarnational approach.

However, Thils was more deliberate than the Jesuit theologian Léopold Malevez who taught at the Jesuit *studium* in Eindhoven (near Louvain). Malevez’s article ‘Deux théologies catholiques de l’histoire’⁶⁷ proposed to give a similar insight into the theology of history but actually displayed a strong preference for the incarnational tendency.

4. Theology of Society

Marxist philosophy not only challenged theological thinking regarding history, it also questioned the organization of concrete societies and the value that should be attributed to them. Prior to the Second World War historical studies on society,⁶⁸ can be distinguished from attempts to find a new foundation of society

⁶⁵ “un optimisme un peu excessif” (Jean Daniélou, ‘Compte rendu de Gustave Thils. Théologie des réalités terrestres. I. Préludes,’ *Études* 255 (1947), 135). For a second, less severe, review: M. Flick, ‘G. Thils. Théologie des réalités terrestres. I. Préludes. II. Théologie de l’histoire,’ *Gregorianum* 52 (1951), 603-604.

⁶⁶ “Pas assez eschatologique” (Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Carnets posthumes*, ed. Françoise Marrou-Flamant (Paris, 2006), p. 436).

⁶⁷ Malevez, ‘Deux théologies catholiques de l’histoire’ (see above, n. 61).

⁶⁸ E.g. Henri-Xavier, *L’Augustinisme politique : essai sur la formation des théories politiques du Moyen Age* [L’église et l’état au Moyen Age 2] (Paris, 1934).

on Christian principles to found, in line with the rise of totalitarian tendencies, a New Christian Order . Exemplary in this regard is again the work of Maritain. After his conversion to Catholicism Maritain upheld strong relations with Charles Maurras and his far right political movement *Action Française*, but the condemnation of the movement by ecclesial authorities in 1926 brought Maritain to reconsider his view on Christian interference in society, coming closer to a Christian democratic position.⁶⁹ As with the theology of history, so also with the theology of society: the present social order had to be judged from a Christian perspective, be it as ruins on which a ‘*civilisation saine*’ was to be installed, as the French historian Henri-Irenée Marrou put it,⁷⁰ or as a field open to the incarnation of Christian ideals in contrast to the dominant ideologies of totalitarian regimes, as articulated by the Jesuit Yves de Montcheuil.⁷¹ This reflection would, however, gain momentum after the experiences of the Second World War and the search to reestablish the devastated social order.⁷² This theological enthusiasm went hand in hand with a broader social movement of Left Catholicism⁷³ that inspired Christians to engage in the socio-political transformation of society and to take a critical stance toward traditional forms of societal or ecclesial organization. Compared to the previous themes, the degree to which theological attention for society was represented in magisterial teaching is surprising: Whether it was in encyclicals in which the social thought of the Church was developed, such as Leo XIII’s *Rerum novarum* or Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno*, or in more political coloured encyclicals like *Divini*

⁶⁹ Philippe Chenaux, *Entre Maurras et Maritain : une génération intellectuelle catholique (1920-1930)* (Paris, 1999) ; Jacques Maritain, *Du régime temporel et de la liberté* [Questions disputées 11] (Paris, 1933); Jacques Maritain, *Christianisme et démocratie* [Collection Civilisation 4] (New York, 1943).

⁷⁰ Henri Davenson (pseudonym of Henri-Irenée Marrou), *Fondements d’une culture chrétienne* [Cahiers de la nouvelle Journée] (Paris, 1934).

⁷¹ Yves de Montcheuil, *Vie chrétienne et action temporelle* [Les lampes 7] (Paris, 1944).

⁷² E.g. Charles Journet, *Exigences chrétiennes en politique* (Paris, 1945); Dominique Dubarle, *Optimisme devant ce monde* [Collection Foi vivante] (Paris, 1949).

⁷³ Cf. Jadoulle, *Chrétiens modernes?* (see above n. 7); Latré, *Tussen strijd en inkeer* (see above n. 7); Pelletier and Schlegel, eds., *A la gauche du Christ* (see above n. 7).



Redemptoris. Each time the Church wished to answer socio-political questions by which she was confronted, such as the situation of the working class, the success of socialism, the rise of the totalitarian regimes or the existence of communism.

The origins of social reflection in Louvain can be found in Cardinal Van Roey's and rector Van Waeyenbergh's 1937 initiative to found a chair for 'contemporary pseudo-mysticisms'. The first chair holder, Franz Grégoire,⁷⁴ studied the ideologies of Marxism and National-Socialism and became one of the main experts on Hegel. It was in the domain of moral theology that the reflection would be continued. Inspired by the movement of personalism, Louis Janssens became famous for his book *Personne et société*.⁷⁵ Later on, while holding the chair of Moral Theology from 1947 onwards, Janssens gave further elaboration to these ideas focussing on a personalist moral theology. This offered, besides a renewal for Catholic sexual ethics, also a new perspective on the freedom of conscience and religious freedom.⁷⁶ At his previous chair of Fundamental

⁷⁴ Joseph Coppens, 'Le chanoine Franz Grégoire : Sa formation, son enseignement, son œuvre,' *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 37 (1961), 390-402 ; Joseph Ponthot, 'In memoriam Franz Grégoire,' *Revue théologique de Louvain* 9 (1978), 129-132 ; Honoré van Waeyenbergh, 'Hommage de l'Université Catholique à M. le chanoine Grégoire, professeur à la Faculté de Théologie,' *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 37 (1961), 389.

⁷⁵ Louis Janssens, *Personne et société. Théories actuelles et essai doctrinal* [Dissertationes ad gradum magistri in Facultate Theologica vel in Facultate Iuris Canonici consequendum conscriptae series II – Tomus 32] (Gembloux, 1939). On this 'personalist' inspiration, see in particular Johan De Tavernier, 'The Historical Roots of Personalism : From Renouvier's Le Personnalisme, Mounier's Manifeste au service du personnalisme and Maritain's Humanisme intégral to Janssens' *Personne et Société*,' *Ethical Perspectives* 16 (2009), 361-392.

⁷⁶ Roger Burggraeve, 'The Holistic Personalism of Professor Magister Louis Janssens,' *Louvain Studies* 27 (2002), 29-38; Jan Jans, 'Some Remarks on the Work of Professor Emeritus Louis Janssens,' in *Personalist Morals: Essays in Honor of Professor Louis Janssens*, eds. Joseph A. Selling [Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 83] (Leuven, 1988), pp. 319-328.

Theology, Janssens was succeeded by Thils. As already pointed out, Thils was very much engaged with the temporal order and had already developed a theological perspective on the social order in his first volume of *Théologie des réalités terrestres*.⁷⁷ It was, however, his book *Théologie et réalité sociale*⁷⁸ that marked his position in the theology of society. This book, published in 1952, was in line with the previous two volumes of *Théologie des réalités terrestres* and provided a systematic survey of what a theology of society should consist of, giving clear indications that Christians should engage in the transformation of society to establish God's reign. The tension he discerned between an active involvement to transform society and install, as it were, God's reign, and to withdraw from society based on an exaggerated belief in transcendence and in the eschatological discontinuity of the 'new heavens, and earth', led him to write his work *Transcendance ou incarnation?*⁷⁹ In his conclusion, Thils answered the question raised in the title and would point out that both aspects were needed in transforming society.⁸⁰ Whereas Thils remained in the field of speculative thought, Albert Dondeyne succeeded in making his ideas accepted in the practical domain. His book *Geloof en wereld*, published in 1961, reflected the ideas he had developed in previous years in interaction with the students involved in the *Universitas* movement, and offered an understanding of the relationship between Christianity and the temporal order from both a speculative and a practical perspective. His ideas on Christianity and the socio-political order emphasized, in line with his overall thought, the autonomy of both spheres, yet also their harmonious co-existence and reciprocal fruitfulness. These ideas would inspire a

⁷⁷ Cf. Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres. I.* (see above, n. 59), pp. 134-149.

⁷⁸ Gustave Thils, *Théologie et réalité sociale*, (Tournai and Paris, 1952).

⁷⁹ Gustave Thils, *Transcendance ou Incarnation ? Essai sur la conception du christianisme* (Louvain, 1950); Gustave Thils, *Christianismes et christianisme* [Bibliothèque de l'Institut Supérieur des Sciences Religieuses] (Paris and Tournai, 1951).

⁸⁰ "To the question raised at the beginning of this book, *Transcendance or incarnation?* One may answer, it seems, **Transcendance and Incarnation**. The one and the other. True Christianity holds the two movements, the two attitudes, the two ideas" (Thils, *Transcendance*, p. 97).

whole generation of students, among them many future policymakers, to actively engage in society out of a Christian motivation, while not excluding other thoughts or opinions.⁸¹ Dondeyne had an influence on the Flemish-speaking community similar to the influence Jacques Leclercq, professor of sociology, on the French-speaking community with his teaching and the journal *La Cité Chrétienne* during the interbellum.⁸² Through his theoretical and practical engagement, both directly and indirectly, Dondeyne contributed to the development of Flemish Christian Democracy and a value-based presence of Christianity in the public sphere.

5. Theology of the Laity

The final area where dialogue between the Church and the world benefited from a rediscovery of the human being was in the theology of the laity. It was the theological and ecclesial rediscovery of this group within the Church that made

⁸¹ Prominent representatives indicated by Boudens and Schramme are professors such as Antoon Vergote or KU Leuven rectors Piet De Somer and Roger Dillemans; in the field of politics Gaston Eyskens, Gaston Geens, and Wilfried Martens. (Roger Boudens, 'Dondeyne en "Universitas"', in Roger Boudens, *De Kerk in Vlaanderen: Momentopnamen* (Apeldoorn, 1994), pp. 321-325; Annick Schramme, 'Universitas, meer dan een studentenbeweging,' *Onze Alma Mater* 39 (1985), 251-264).

⁸² Christian Grogard, 'Jacques Leclercq, La Cité Chrétienne et l'Action Catholique en Belgique entre les deux guerres,' *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 82 (1987), 561-573 ; Pierre Sauvage, *Jacques Leclercq 1891-1971 : un arbre en plein vent* (Paris and Louvain-la-Neuve, 1992).

theologians to reconsider the laity's relation with the world.⁸³ The publication of the book *La France, pays de mission?* in 1943 and the French Cardinal Suhard's initiatives in the framework of *Mission de France* clearly indicated the need to reach out to the social groups that had become increasingly separated from the Church.⁸⁴ Numerous efforts, including missionary activities in working-class areas, were initiated to close the widening gap between the Church and the faithful. In this endeavour, the laity were envisaged as having a privileged relation with the temporal order and, moreover, becoming aware of their increasing responsibilities, which were due to their increasing involvement in the apostolate of the ecclesial hierarchy. Crucial in this regard were the different movements of Catholic Action. After a strong promotion of this organisation under the pontificate of Pius XI inspired by restorative motives (*restaurare omnia in Christo*), and local successes, such as the Young Workers Movement of Joseph Cardijn in Belgium,⁸⁵ a strong basis was laid for international initiatives of lay-apostolate after the Second World War. Highlights in this period were the two World Congresses for the Lay Apostolate (1951, 1957), where all those involved in local lay-apostolate – both laity as religious – came together in an international context. Moreover, the body in charge of organizing these conferences, COPECIAL, also met on a regular base and formed an international network for experts in this field.⁸⁶ This renewed interest and promotion of the lay-apostolate merged with the teachings on the Mystical Body of Christ promoted by Pius XII

⁸³ For more information see Claire Toupin-Guyot, 'Théologie du laïcat, théologie et laïcat. 1962-1975,' in *Un nouvel âge de la théologie ? 1965-1980*, eds. Dominique Davon and Michel Fourcade [Signes des Temps] (Paris, 2009), 99-108 ; Paul Coulon, 'De la France, pays de missionnaires à la France, pays de mission,' *Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses* 9 (2009), 3-7 ; Bernard Minvielle, *L'apostolat des laïcs à la veille du concile (1949-1959) : Histoire des congrès mondiaux de 1951 et 1957*, Foreword by Rosemary Goldie [Studia Friburgensia : Series Historica] (Fribourg, 2001); Humberto José Sanchez Zarinana, *L'être et la mission du laïc dans une église pluri-ministérielle: D'une théologie du laïcat à une ecclésiologie de solidarité (1953-2003)* [Religions et Spiritualité] (Paris, 2008).

⁸⁴ Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel, *La France, pays de mission?* [Rencontres 12] (Paris, 1943).

⁸⁵ See François Rosart and Thierry Scaillet, *Entre jeux et enjeux. Mouvements de jeunesse catholiques en Belgique 1910-1940* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2002).

⁸⁶ COPECIAL was the permanent body, founded in 1952 by Vitorino Veronese, in charge of organizing these World Congresses. As such it functioned as a consultative body of the laity and experts on the lay-apostolate in pre-conciliar years.



and Maritain's idea of a new Christianity. The result was that within the field of theology, and stimulated by the movement of *ressourcement*, a renewed interest in the Biblical and historical understanding of the laity emerged. This fresh perspective on the laity helped to establish a new understanding of their nature and role in the Church and society. Exemplary and well known is Yves Congar's work *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*, but also Karl Rahner's *Über das Laienapostolat* and Pietro Pavan's *L'apostolato dei laici nel mondo moderno* are also considered clear expressions of this theological emphasis.⁸⁷

It was, however, a Louvain professor of Dogmatic Theology, Gérard Philips, who preceded Congar by one year in publishing the book *De leek in de Kerk*.⁸⁸ A diocesan priest himself, Philips was very much informed on the recent questions regarding the lay-apostolate. His involvement with movements of Catholic Action had resulted in 1952 in his appointment as general chaplain of the Flemish association of youth movements of Catholic Action, *Jeugdverbond voor Katholieke Actie*. There were close links between his vocational commitment on the one hand, and his theological work on the other. His theological reflection on the nature and role of the laity and their consequences for the Church and theology would also be expressed later in his intense

⁸⁷ Yves Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* [Unam Sanctam] (Paris, 1953); Karl Rahner, 'Über das Laienapostolat,' in Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*. 2 vol. (Einsiedeln, 1955), 2: 339-373; Pietro Pavan, *L'apostolato dei laici nel mondo moderno* (Rome, 1954).

⁸⁸ Gérard Philips, *De leek in de Kerk* (Leuven, 1952). This book became widely known in its French translation: Gérard Philips, *Le rôle du laïcat dans l'Eglise* [Cahiers de l'actualité religieuse] (Tournai, 1954).

involvement with the organization of the Second World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in Rome (1957). It is interesting to note the differences occurring between Philips' 1952 book and the book *Naar een volwassen Christendom*,⁸⁹ published in 1961. The first book sought to continue the initiatives taken in the rediscovery of the nature and position of the laity in the Church: a reflection on their dignity as such, their relationship with the ecclesial hierarchy and their role in the lay-apostolate. The second book took account of the developments in the theology of the laity during the preceding ten years and emphasised to a greater degree the autonomous and particular role and responsibility of the laity in the Church and world. As such, this book proved to be more in line with the emancipated self-understanding of the laity in its full development. Moreover, whereas the first book focussed mostly the position of the laity within the Church, the second book reflected explicitly on the nature of the modern world and the position which the Church, through the laity, could play in it.

6. Conclusion

This article has attempted to present the underdeveloped cluster of theological research known by the term, 'Christian anthropology'. While clearly having roots in the interbellum with prominent thinkers such as Jacques Maritain or the representatives of the '*nouvelle théologie*', Christian anthropology became particularly prosperous after the Second World War. In general, this current of thought was characterized by an interest in domains that were traditionally considered as outside the boundaries of theological research: theology *ad extra*.

⁸⁹ Gérard Philips, *Naar een volwassen Christendom* (Leuven, 1961); Gérard Philips, *Pour un christianisme adulte* [Cahiers de l'actualité religieuse] (Tournai, 1962).



Slowly but steadily these domains were incorporated into theology, be it a reflection on the human being (Christian humanism), the temporal order as such (*Théologie des réalités terrestres*), the history in which humanity is placed (theology of history), the social context (theology of society), or the identity of the laity as holding a specific responsibility within the Church while also actively engaged in the world and society (theology of the laity). In all of these fields, the theologians of the Louvain Faculty of Theology were very much engaged, be it as pioneers or as synthesizers. Works of Charles Moeller, Albert Dondeyne, Gustave Thils and Gerard Philips not only were thoroughly familiar with these fields but they also became leading scholars in these areas by giving them new impulses and areas for further development. It should therefore not be a surprise that the Belgian theologians were so prominent during the Second Vatican Council with regard to the development of the Council's Pastoral Constitution and the establishment of its 'anthropological turn'.⁹⁰ As Philippe Chenaux noted:

“It has been said that Louvain theologians played a leading role at the Council. The particular case of Scheme XIII perfectly illustrates the efficacy of the “Belgian method”.”⁹¹ Indeed, while the orientation of this document had to be

⁹⁰ Hans-Joachim Sander, 'Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute. Gaudium et spes,' in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, eds. Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, 4 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 2005), 4: 581-886, there p. 605.

⁹¹ « Les théologiens de Louvain, on l'a dit, ont joué un rôle de premier plan au concile. Le cas particulier du schéma XIII illustre parfaitement l'efficacité de la “méthode belge” dans l'élaboration des grands documents de Vatican II » (Philippe Chenaux, 'L'influence des écoles théologiques dans la rédaction de la constitution pastorale Gaudium et spes (1962-1965),' in *I padri e le scuole teologiche nei concili : atti del VII Simposio*

decided and developed during the sessions of the Council itself, since no previous magisterial teaching or preparatory schemes were available, these members of the *squadra belga* were well positioned to contribute the fruits of their work on Christian anthropology to conciliar teaching.⁹² Thus, they introduced a theme in theological research that would remain under discussion up to the present day.⁹³

Internazionale della Facoltà di Teologia, Roma, 6-7 marzo 2003, eds. Johannes Grohe, Jeronimo Leal and Vito Reale (Città del Vaticano, 2006), 161-178, there p. 173).

⁹² Mathijs Lamberigts and Leo Declerck, 'La contribution de la "squadra belga" au Concile Vatican II,' *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 21 (2012), 157-183.

⁹³ E.g. Christoph Theobald, 'Pour une anthropologie théologique de la différence,' *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 102 (2014), 385-407.